



# Air Force Worldwide Talent Contest

It's an idea that's now five decades old. It's a motivational, morale building tool for generating "in-house" entertainment. But in a larger sense it's an idea that's timeless - it's family entertaining family.

Tops In Blue began in 1953 as a vision created by retired Colonel Reilly (then a major) to recognize the high caliber of amateur entertainment available within the Air Force. This concept provided an opportunity for jet engine mechanics, computer specialists, medical technicians or personnel in any other Air Force career fields to display their talents and at the same time compete with their peers to be "the best of the best." Reilly's original idea of family entertaining family initially created the Air Force Worldwide Talent contest...fourteen categories ranging from comedy to drama, magic to juggling, vocal to instrumental, gospel to pop, and jazz to country and western. It provided an excellent setting for every possible form of entertainment. The tremendous quality and diversity of talent from the very first contest made the idea of Tops In Blue a reality. Even today, the competition is the source each year for a new Tops In Blue team. In just the first few years, the contest included competitors Jerry Van Dyke, Frank Gorshin and the 1953 SPEBSQSA International Barbershop Champions and later in 1981, the comedian known as Sinbad.

Designed for multiple levels of competition, contestants had to prove themselves at base level before winning a spot on the Air Force Worldwide Talent Contest stage. Literally thousands of Air Force members competed at base-level contests held at Service Clubs (then) or Community Centers in hopes of going forward to major command competitions. The major commands then assembled their most hopeful competitors into acts and headed to the Air Force level competition. This 10-day competition included a wide variety of rehearsals, auditions, programs, and technical training all designed to help the contestants hone their entertainment skills. Whole communities came out to support the shows, as celebrity judges like Barry White, Rebecca Holden and Sinbad determined the best in the Air Force. Competition was fierce and finals night, electric, as each 4-minute act vied for the first place trophy called "Roger" or the smaller second place trophy appropriately named "Wilco."

In the 70s, 80s, and early 90s the thrill of competition and the glamorous excitement of the event brought hopefuls back year after year, each time gleaming new and improved skills from the process of competition. In the mid 90-s, due to funding cutbacks and military downsizing, the advancement process changed, first to regional versus major command competitions and in '95 to a streamlined format of video reviews.

The talent contest is still used today as the source of talent to support the upcoming Tops In Blue tour. Contestants forward their audition tapes directly to Headquarters Air Force Services Agency, Entertainment Branch where a team of entertainment experts determine the suitability for the Worldwide Talent Contest, held annually at Lackland AFB, Texas. The 10-day competition has been scaled down to six main talent categories and is no longer judged by celebrities but rather the outgoing Tops In Blue team. Although the process is streamlined the result is the same, as contestants still feel the thrill of competition, hope for a "Roger" or "Wilco" and go through rigorous "casting call" auditions just to be named the next Tops In Blue.



I won a Wilco, but as far as I'm concerned, it could have been a Grammy, and Emmy or an Oscar...

I hold it in the highest esteem for participating with such an amazing caliber of talent, and then to walk away with an award of any kind was truly a gift for me.

*Tammy Lamar 1994*

Have a "Roger" humbles me in many ways...On a personal basis it represents a form of recognition for an effort and or a talent that seemed to come out of nowhere. In terms of others, it represents an elegant, concrete form of recognition for dedication and commitment.

*John Doyle, 1955*

The Air Force Worldwide Talent Contest and its extension into Tops In Blue is one of the most exciting concepts in the entertainment arena today. It's a master plan with a masterful execution.

*Ward Grant, publicist for Bob Hope  
Capital Flyer, 23 July 1993*

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*Tammy Lamar '94*





Air Force Worldwide  
Contest Hosts

1953	Ellsworth AFB, SD	1977	Patrick AFB, FL
1954	Sampson AFB, NY	1978	McGuire AFB, NJ
1955	Lowry AFB, CO	1979	Patrick AFB, FL
1956	Nellis AFB, NV	1980	Travis AFB, CA
1957	Langley AFB, VA	1981	Keesler AFB, MS
1958	Keesler AFB, MS	1982	Wright-Patterson AFB, OH
1959	F.E. Warren AFB, WY	1983	Tyndall AFB, FL
1961	Andrews AFB, MD	1984	Charleston AFB, SC
1962	Shaw AFB, SC	1985	Minot AFB, ND
		1986	Minot AFB, ND
		1987	USAF Academy, CO
		1988	Lackland AFB, TX
		1989	Minot AFB, ND
		1990	Minot AFB, ND



1963	Edwards AFB, CA	1991	Tyndall AFB, FL
1964	Shaw AFB, SC	1992	
1965	Beale AFB, CA	1993	
1966	Westover AFB, MA	1994	
1967	Wright-Patterson AFB, OH	1995	
1968	Rickenbacker AFB, OH	1996	
1969	Edwards AFB, CA	1997	Andrews AFB
1970	Patrick AFB, FL	1998	Andrews AFB, MD
1971	Norton AFB, CA	1999	Andrews AFB, MD
1972	Nellis AFB, NV	2000	Lackland AFB, TX
1973	Lackland AFB, TX	2001	Lackland AFB, TX
1974	Lackland AFB, TX	2002	Lackland AFB, TX
1975	Lackland AFB, TX	2003	Lackland AFB, TX
1976	Nellis AFB, NV	2004	Lackland AFB, TX

## TOPS IN BLUE

Somewhere I read there would be this day  
Where the best would gather in their own way  
An expression of talent would then be displayed  
For all to witness as a big, big parade

I say to myself what can I do  
To accomplish the name of TOPS IN BLUE  
I know it's not possible without sweat on my brow  
So I must not delay – it's best to start now

So I take some ideas and toss them around  
And then ask my friends "Hey, man, how'd I sound?"  
Hey, man, stop laughing and tell me true  
Will I ever make it to TOPS IN BLUE

Not like that is always the word  
Man you're the worst I've ever heard  
Aw, come on, man, was I really that bad?  
Naw, man, not really, you were just sad

So I try hard to cast off the criticism  
And increase my goal with extra egotism  
I've started it now so I'll see it through  
And I'll have my chance at TOPS IN BLUE

The day of the base contest I'm nervous as hell  
There's always that doubt that I might not fare well  
So I sing my song and dance my dance  
Never really thinking I'd really have a chance

Now it was up to the judges who held our fate  
As my heart started to pound during the long, long wait  
And I say "Let it please be me..."

The judges returned and tension was felt  
as my heart fell below my belt.  
They called off the winners and when they were through  
I was one step closer to TOPS IN BLUE

I shake some hands, I take a bow  
I wipe the sweat from my brow  
I'm so excited, so filled with glee  
My chest stands proud for all to see

This was just the beginning you understand  
For now I must compete and win command  
Where things would be rougher and competition tougher  
And little time could be spent with the bad.

But with my chin in the air I went like the devil may care  
determined to see my goal through  
For I had my heart set and surely nothing could get  
in the way of TOPS IN BLUE

Now at command on the stage  
I stand with a microphone in my hand  
I sing my song, I do my dance, and wonder again if I'll have a chance  
For there's a lot of talent here I've watched them perform

I've heard the crowd cheer, I know that they had done their best  
I wondered if I had stood the test  
The judges took longer than they had before  
Discussing and tallying who had the best score

And then the time came for the moment of truth  
While everyone quietly shook in their boots  
"Let it please be me..."

Then I heard a familiar sound which meant  
I had won another round  
I shook some hands, I took a bow  
I wiped the sweat from my brow  
It was at that moment I really knew  
That I would have my chance at TOPS IN BLUE

When we arrived at Worldwide, the feeling was hard to describe  
The anticipation was a great sensation, and could not be held inside  
For there on display, before the show  
stood two statues, "ROGER" and "WILCO"

One made of silver, the other of gold  
They both stood tall, proud and bold.  
Wow, they were such a beautiful sight  
And I knew if I earned it I would get one tonight

Now the judges have gone to their rooms to decide  
And I feel all choked up inside  
My pulse beat faster and then I knew  
It was the final call for TOPS IN BLUE  
"Let it please be me..."

With everyone quiet, a man came on the stage  
With a list of finalists, and as he read the page  
There were cheers and then some tears  
As he continued down the line  
I heard a lot of names, but I didn't hear mine

So I shook no hands and took no bow  
For me my quest was over now  
I realized then the best had won  
But I still felt proud of what I'd done

I've gained self-confidence and I understand  
that this competition has made me a better man  
And even though I didn't accomplish what I had desired  
Maybe someone in my audience had been inspired

Well, I've sung my song and did my dance  
And I thank God for giving me the chance  
To show the world what I could do  
With just the thought of being TOPS IN BLUE